

Serving Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

INTRO: Welcome to the National Veterans' Training Institute podcast series, where we discuss pressing issues affecting today's veterans.

HOST: Welcome. My name is Hannah and I'm the host of today's NVTI podcast, Serving Veterans Experiencing Homelessness. As we all know, homelessness among veterans is a very serious issue in the United States. Although we are making strides in improving access to housing for our nation's veterans, according to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report, Part One to Congress, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness has dropped 36% since 2010. However, with more than 40,000 veterans still experiencing homelessness, it is of vital importance that those serving veterans understand homelessness and what types of programs are available for our veterans. We have an excellent panel joining us today to discuss just that. Will each of you please just take a moment to introduce yourselves. Tell us where you're from, and tell us a little bit about your role, and how you serve veterans experiencing homelessness. Karen, will you get us started, please?

Karen: Yes, Hannah, thank you so much. I'd be happy too. My name is Karen Land and I'm the Senior Director of Client Services for the American GI Forum, National Veterans Outreach Program, San Antonio, TX. I oversee client services for our company in San Antonio, Dallas, Fort Worth, El Paso, Houston, Austin, and Plano. We provide wrap-around services for our veterans. We have housing programs: Supportive Services for Veteran Families, also known as SSVF, and Rapid Rehousing, which is a HUD funded program, employment programs, Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, HVRP, as well as two state-funded employment programs, a transitional housing program, and a mental health program. Having wrap around services has allowed us to address the areas that prevent veterans from sustaining their housing and becoming self-sufficient.

Jonathan: Hello, my name is Jonathan Narcisse, and I'm an Assistant Director of Veterans' Employment and Training Service for the state of Louisiana. As part of the

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Dallas region, I'm responsible for monitoring and oversight of the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program to ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory guidelines.

Jennifer: Hello, my name is Jen Steigerwald and I'm the Project Manager of the National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center, or NVTAC. NVTAC provides training, technical assistance, and support to Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program grant recipients nationwide.

Rashida: Hello, my name is Rashida Williams, National Director of Workforce Programs For U.S.VETS, where I oversee career development services, as we are also a Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program grantee. I am responsible for ensuring our military community and partners are served with excellence through our work. At U.S.VETS, we are committed to serving those who have served through housing, counseling, career development and comprehensive services to ensure veterans and their families have their needs met to regain and maintain independence.

Savannah: Hello, I'm Savannah Woods, CEO of Echo Housing Corporation, located here in Evansville, IN. Our agency has two different programs dedicated to serving homeless veterans: the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, or HVRP, serves homeless veterans seeking meaningful employment. And then Lucas Place II is our permanent supportive housing project dedicated to providing housing stability for homeless veterans. My professional journey related to veterans service to this point includes serving on active duty in the US Army, working for the state of Indiana as the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist, or DVOP, at the American Job Center, the HVRP Coordinator and then the Program Director for five supportive housing programs in Southwest Indiana, including Lucas Place II, where I coordinated housing placement for veterans experiencing homelessness.

Zella: My name is Zella Richards. I manage the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program component of the Volunteers of America program. HVRP is an employment-

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focused federal grant overseen by the Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service. Now HVRP is designed to help homeless veterans achieve economic opportunities, address historical inequalities, obtain and maintain competitive and living wage employment to sustain them and their families, and we also link them with community partners to address their individualized and complex employment barriers.

HOST: Thank you all so much for your introductions. It's obvious we have a lot of expertise on this panel and I'm very excited to learn from all of you and then have this information out for others to learn from as well. So, let's start today with some context setting. This is a way we really like to begin our podcast so that we all know we're talking about the same thing. What criteria do you use to determine who meets the definition of a veteran experiencing homelessness? Savannah, will you go first on this one?

Savannah: Sure. It varies by program requirements. In my experience, veteran service agencies have differing criteria for what constitutes both a veteran and homelessness. In HVRP, for example, an individual's considered a veteran if they have a single day of active duty time, not including training time. That program defines homelessness based on the McKinney-Vento definition, which includes veterans in doubled up housing situations or an imminent risk of becoming homeless. Our supportive housing program, however, may have the same definition for a veteran with any service discharge type, but the individual needs to us to have established care with the VA system, which also typically requires 24 months of active duty and an honorable discharge. Our supportive housing program also requires the veteran to meet HUD Category 1 homeless definition for eligibility. So, these different criteria require a lot of navigation, and an in-depth understanding of what supports are available, and then the eligibility for each.

Karen: As Savannah shared often, each program has its own eligibility requirement. We must verify veteran status, income eligibility, assets, and housing status eligibility. We

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answer some questions such as: Is the veteran at risk of homelessness? Is the veteran literally homeless? Or is the veteran chronically homeless?

Jennifer: At NVTAC, we often provide technical assistance on HVRP eligibility and always use national guidance and policies. Veterans Program Letter 02-23 and Attachments 1 and 2 contain the most updated guidance for eligibility.

Jonathan: As previously mentioned, we at VETS determine eligibility of veterans experiencing homelessness through a series of Veterans Program Letters with attachments that provide specific criteria the grantee must establish before enrolling a veteran experiencing homelessness into the HVRP program. As Jennifer stated, the latest guidance can be found in VPL. 02-23 with Attachments 1 and 2.

Rashida: Depending on the services to be rendered, a veteran is someone who has served in active military, naval or air service who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. We also serve those who have served in the National Guard.

Zella: Our program guidelines are based on the Department of Labor VETS program eligibility criteria that's located in the Veterans Program Letter 02-23, and part of that being, we have to determine that they have a military status, participating in at least one day of active service, and that they are discharged. We can accept any kind of discharge except dishonorable. They also have to prove that they are homeless, and we accept that in forms of a letter from a shelter, or a letter from a friend or family, and sometimes we allow them to fill out a form declaring that they are homeless. The other part of that is that we have to ensure during eligibility that they are willing and able to work, because this is an employment program.

HOST: Considering these criteria, are there additional factors that need to be taken into account to determine eligibility and provide optimal support for veterans facing homelessness?

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Jonathan: Yes. So, within DOL VETS, we will determine if the veteran experiencing homelessness is receiving services through other partner programs like the Supportive Services for Veterans, Families, SSVF or Housing and Urban Development, HUD, Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing programs.

Karen: Once the veteran eligibility is determined, each veteran has an assessment to determine the level of services that are needed. During the assessment phase, veterans' needs and barriers are identified, and goals are set by the veteran with his case manager. Then they determine what steps must be taken to achieve these goals and address any barriers that they may have.

Rashida: To build on what Karen shared, we then need to find out what the need is that may need to be addressed first. While the team can provide holistic support, sometimes addressing the greatest need first becomes a building block to addressing others. For example, if serving the veteran family with school aged children, getting them enrolled in school may be a priority focus area. If a veteran is hungry, we may need to address food insecurity concerns.

Savannah: I believe determining eligibility to best assist veterans experiencing homelessness is based on somewhat of two factors, the veteran and the service. It is critical to establish rapport with the veterans so they feel comfortable disclosing aspects of their circumstance that they otherwise would not. Because military service, character of discharge and the veteran serving agencies are so complex, it's important to understand all aspects to ensure the veteran isn't being sent to agencies that they're not eligible for. It's also just as important to remain knowledgeable in agency programs and requirements. Service eligibility is constantly changing based on need and available funding, so having relevant system access or partnerships that have system access is also important to verify veteran and homelessness status.

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Zella: Though a veteran's military and homeless status has been confirmed, they could still be considered ineligible due to being unable or unwilling to work. For example, a veteran may be unable to work if they are experiencing active alcohol or substance use and refuse drug or alcohol counseling and an assessment referral to determine the least restrictive level of care, like residential or outpatient. They have untreated mental health issues. Their service-connected disability letter designates them 100% non-employable or disabled. They are physically or medically unemployed, unable to work, or they require medical assisted living. Now a veteran who is unwilling to work may be only seeking housing services or rental assistance. They may verbally express their unwillingness to comply with the program participation agreement or program guidelines outlined in the Veteran's Handbook or be unwilling to work because they're receiving a VA pension or Social Security.

HOST: Great information. Thank you all so much again. The other side of this is that we know that sometimes finding the veterans experiencing homelessness is difficult. These individuals may fall beneath the proverbial radar. Will you please provide some insights on outreach and engagement strategies? That your teams use to ensure you're reaching veterans who are experiencing homelessness. Jennifer, what are your thoughts on this?

Jennifer: Partnering with organizations such as local emergency shelters, the VA's Grant and Per Diem program, or GPD, SSVF and local state outreach teams can help HVRP teams locate and connect with veterans experiencing homelessness. Meeting the veteran where they are both literally and in their employment journey is a great first step in an outreach plan.

Rashida: I could not agree more, Jennifer. At U.S.VETS, our outreach teams are on the street daily looking to build relationships with those who are unhoused. Our outreach teams take pride in building a relationship of trust during their contact with the veteran. Our employment teams and outreach teams work together to provide veterans whom

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they may meet with information on receiving services to return to work if that is one of their goals.

Karen: As a company, we have a multifaceted outreach effort. We not only outreach to unsheltered veterans that are living in tents and in shelters, but our outreach efforts extend to colleges and universities as well. We meet with student services to help us identify veterans that need our services, whether it is for employment, housing, or mental health services. We're constantly meeting with our community partners to identify transitioning veterans as well through the Joint Base San Antonio Alliance, which is also called JBSA. We have a weekly meeting with the VA to talk about veterans who have been identified as unsheltered but have not been linked up to a program. We also outreach to clients that are transitioning from prison or jail. Once a week, we do a presentation at TDCJ for veterans that are exiting prison. We also use social media and veterans' groups who may be requesting services that we provide.

Savannah: Our agency employs multiple veterans, multiple individuals that have experienced homelessness, and multiple individuals that have experienced working for and navigating through veteran services. We rely on these experiences to develop our initial outreach, recruitment, and engagement strategies. Because we cover an 11-county service area with the mix of urban and rural areas, we develop a canvassing approach to outreach, which includes correctional facilities, essential service agencies such food, clothing, shelter, healthcare and emergency services, learning institutions, both technical and career centers, vocational rehabilitation centers and institutions of higher learning, as well as libraries, employers, county service officers among others. Canvassing is done in person on ground. We also conduct outreach and engagement through social media and our Tri-State Military Resource Network, which consists of more than 100 veteran supporting and service agencies and individuals in Southwest Indiana, Northwest Kentucky and Southeast Illinois who meet monthly to discuss available services, as well as their eligibility criteria, the most appropriate person for referral of a veteran needing services, and to invite and introduce new service agencies

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to the group. Our outreach strategy evolves based on trends among the veteran population and oftentimes on the time of year. For example, we have seen increases and decreases in veterans experiencing homelessness, and whether they're category one or an imminent risk based on the weather at different times of the year.

Zella: Community awareness is what we call it, the HVRP team, we attend sharing groups such as Texas Veterans Network - Combined Arms, Cornerstone Reentry, and Texas Network Solutions Interagency Workforce Group. These are to bring awareness to the community providers. We also establish relationships with substance use reentry and dual diagnosed programs throughout our congressional area. Furthermore, we regularly connect and share participants with Vocational Rehabilitative Services, the Texas Veteran Commission Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, and attend their conferences to introduce ourselves to new workers. And also, relationships are forged with Texas Homeless Coalitions by attending their sharing groups and participating in PIT Count, Point-in-Time Count, that is done annually. Now, this also includes resource centers where we complete outreach activities. We engage them and invite other community services to participate in activities, and by our program activities, and/or make our presence known at shelters, soup kitchens, jails, veteran courts, job fairs, veteran friendly employers, and the Texas Workforce Commission.

Jonathan: As someone who provides monitoring and oversight, we remind the grantee of their terms and conditions of the grant, with emphasis on the service delivery areas and how that is aligned against the current population survey to determine the targeted populations most in need of the HVRP services. We also place emphasis on stakeholder engagements with the homeless shelters, penal institutions, faith-based organizations, and mental health service providers.

HOST: These outreach efforts really make all the difference. Also important to this conversation is not just the veteran who is currently experiencing homelessness, but the veteran at risk of homelessness, and we've heard a little bit of conversation about that

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and strategies already. But let's dive a little bit deeper. Will you share how you work with veterans who are at risk of homelessness? What different or unique strategies and considerations might you need to employ to best serve those veterans? Rashida, will you go first for us?

Rashida: Sure, Hannah. Thank you. Veterans and their families who are at risk of homelessness have unique needs that we must consider. If they need to be connected to additional services to prevent homelessness, the team will focus there first. If the veteran has other providers working to support them, our team will often case conference to avoid duplication of services and to ensure the veteran knows who will be supporting them and how? Often, miscommunication causes more stress than help so my team works to ensure veterans know who to contact first. Other considerations include focusing on the safety of the veteran and their family, childcare needs, transportation, and how close the veteran is to losing their housing. Every situation is complex. An assessment or discovery may reveal that more services are needed than what was initially presented to the team.

Karen: One of the ways that we work with veterans who at risk of homelessness is through our SSVF program, which primarily serves veterans who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Once a veteran has been determined to be at risk of homelessness and meets the threshold for our services, we can assist the veteran. As we do with our literally homeless veterans, we do an assessment to determine the level of services that the veteran needs. We assist the veterans with paying any arrears that are owed, and sometimes we even pay additional months of rent so that the veteran can get back on their feet. During the assessment, we also work with their veteran to address any barriers that may have caused them to be at risk. For example, if it's a loss of employment, we've referred them to our employment program. For barriers that we are unable to address in-house, we will refer to our community partners.

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Jonathan: We, VETS, stressed to the grantee that accurate data about their service delivery areas must align with what is known regarding the sheltered and unsheltered population Point-in-Time Count. This is coupled with their source document, like that of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Department of Veterans Affairs data in order to drive their successes. Outreach with other agencies serving the same population of at risk of homeless veterans is crucial because the grantee has the employment element that is added value to the veteran achieving a successful outcome.

Savannah: As Jonathan and others have said, collaboration with other agencies is so important. In addition to maintaining the Veteran By Name List, we have a secondary list of veterans who are at risk of homelessness, what agencies they're working closely with, including what steps those agencies are taking, and consistent frequent follow-up to refer them to the most immediate service to prevent homelessness. As part of HVRP, we have an employment specialist who works directly with employers to advocate on behalf of the veteran resolve workplace conflict should it arise and support the veteran in maintaining appropriate income levels based on the cost of living. These supports occur while our Veteran Navigator continues to assist them through their journey and addressing mental health barriers, maintaining their sobriety, positive support systems and any other barrier face that would lead to homelessness.

Zella: Veterans at risk of homeless need money management and various life skills in individual or group settings. Many receive emergency rental assistance and housing programs such as the SSVF programs, the Combatants Overcoming Income Needs, and Community Action Partners. However, once the agency discontinued the rental assistance, one thing we've learned is that veterans have become at risk of homelessness again. Now, although learn helplessness plays a big part in the following behaviors, they greatly contribute to the status of substance abuse, emotional outbursts, and domestic and family violence. Furthermore, some have difficulty to keep in jobs as evidenced by noncompliance with parole stipulation, quitting without notice, walking off shifts disrespectful behavior towards authority figures, testing positive for drugs, arriving

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to work smelling of alcohol or drugs, and thinking errors on many levels. Now these all greatly contribute to poor money management and impede their ability to, you know, maintain employment, and sustain themselves and their families.

Jennifer: To summarize what my colleagues have shared, preventing at risk veterans from entering a period of homelessness is critical. Beginning to identify potential barriers at the point of intake, or, ideally, outreach can assist program staff and quickly and sustainably addressing their current needs that led to being at risk of homelessness.

HOST: In your work, I'm sure you also see the intersectionality of homelessness with other special and underserved veteran populations. In your experience, are there underserved populations of veterans experiencing homelessness that might not receive the assistance they need? What suggestions do you have to improve access to services for these veterans? Karen, will you please start for us?

Karen: Yes, Hannah, two of the most difficult veteran populations to reach are women veterans and the LGBTQ+ veteran community. There are many women veterans who do not identify themselves as being homeless because they are couch surfing with their children at someone's home. Women veterans have faced many challenges after transitioning from the military. Some may have experienced sexual trauma and are still dealing with the effects of the trauma and do not want to reach out for help from veteran organizations. Veterans from the LGBTQ+ community were probably ostracized while on active duty, and just like the women, veterans may not feel a part of the veteran community. Because of this, they do not seek out assistance from the veteran organizations. So, to ensure that we're reaching these populations, we must continue to work with our community partners to raise awareness and get the word out to these communities. Our teams must look like the veteran population that we serve. We must have people on our team with shared experiences so that we can effectively outreach to the communities that are underserved. We must use every avenue available to us like social media, print media and we must get continue to work with our city and our county

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governments who have outreach programs to maximize our efforts in reaching these underserved populations.

Jennifer: To add to what Karen said, veteran populations who have been historically and systemically underserved, such as LGBTQ+, black, indigenous, and people of color veterans, and other populations, may not receive all the services they may benefit from. To resolve this, organizations must be intentional about their approach and provide resources that are easily accessible and approachable for all cultures, backgrounds, and varying characteristics.

Rashida: Veterans who come from areas of high poverty tend to fall through the cracks in receiving veteran specific services if they access services at all. The goal is to provide culturally appropriate outreach services that engage the veteran in a way that feels safe and that their circumstances are understood.

Jonathan: One strategy that comes to mind is to meet them where they live. They are not always hanging out at soup kitchens, shelters, or fixed structures. It is important to remember that the underserved and marginalized communities are not necessarily confined to one race and/or ethnicity.

Savannah: My colleagues have shared so many great thoughts. We've identified various veteran populations experiencing homelessness that are not receiving the assistance they need and for various reasons. Whether this is the Vietnam era veteran who didn't receive the appropriate welcome home, the LGBTQ+ veteran that was alienated during their time in service, the disabled veteran who doesn't know where to start, the veteran whose pride gets in the way of them asking for help, the recently released veteran who doesn't know what services exist, or even the veteran living in remote or rural counties that do not have the means to access services. The list goes on and on. Improving access to services for these veterans starts with our community meeting them where they're at, as Jonathan said. This starts and is tied directly to our

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outreach and engagement strategy. By diversifying our outreach, we can assist underserved or marginalized veteran populations. This is done by meeting and informing community leaders and members about what services we provide or that are available through referrals for veterans experiencing homelessness, and by us being present. As a lead agency for the federal Promise Zone designation, we're afforded the additional opportunity to reach high poverty neighborhoods through already established partnerships. Because our mission is to provide supportive services to individuals experiencing homelessness, we strive to produce an opportunity for everyone, regardless of background or circumstance.

Zella: Also, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic veterans are underserved population veterans that experience homelessness and they are difficult to reach. Few seek help partly because of their faith, belief, and culture. The ask is how do we find those who do not ask for help? We must go to them. There need to be more than telephone calls and fliers to capture this population. Our presence enables us to develop therapeutic relationships and present opportunities for us to honor our word. Therefore, successful HVRP will ensure at least one teammate, accompanied by our agency's branding, regularly visit places that underserved populations that they frequent and connect with local partners, such as outreach directly on the street and encampments and meal sites. Also, we connect with partners outlined in NVTAC Welcome Pack, which contains contact links. These include local, state, and national resources. We've included a resource guide with the podcast that contains many of the national resources. A few of the local agencies we connect with are Dallas County Homeless Solutions, Housing Authority, Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, Texas Veteran Commission, Dallas Salvation Army, Mental Health Mental Retardation of Tarrant County, the Liberty House and it's a veteran transitional program, the Presbyterian Night Shelter, which includes the Patriot House, which is a veteran transitional house, the North Texas HCS of Dallas, Dallas and Fort Worth Recovery Resource that has the SSVF program, the GI Forum that has the SSVF program and an HVRP program, and it's likely that most states and local areas have similar agencies.

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HOST: Now, we've already discussed services and programs a good bit throughout this conversation, but I want to ensure we make space for this critical topic and that you're able to address anything that you feel is really worth emphasizing or that maybe we haven't brought up yet. So, what are some supportive service programs available to veterans experiencing homelessness?

Jennifer: Local Continuums of Care and community work groups can be a great place to start. COCs include many organizations community wide that provide various services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Jonathan: Besides those already mentioned, Veterans Readiness and Employment (Chapter 31 VR&E), Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Veteran Treatment Court, soup kitchens, Goodwill, Salvation Army, mental health providers are all services available to help those experiencing homelessness.

Savannah: In our region, we have an incredibly strong network of service providers. Aside from our HVRP, which I've discussed, our Continuum of Care and Coordinated Entry System is dedicated to effectively ending veteran homelessness, which is a system we receive referrals from to place our veterans into our Lucas Place II permanent supportive housing program, Supportive Services for Veteran Families or SSVF, which was previously mentioned, VA's HUD-VASH and Grant Per Diem programs, the American Job Centers' veteran representatives, VFWs and American Legions have assistance available to support veterans experiencing homelessness. We have multiple ministries that support agencies that assist veterans experiencing homelessness, a treatment center with the Help for Heroes program dedicated to addressing mental health and substance use amongst veterans and active military. We have multiple landlords in the community who look to house veterans, even auto repair shops that will conduct maintenance on veterans' vehicles for free or drastically reduced charges which support their gaining employment. And the list goes on.

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Rashida: I agree with Savannah, the Continuum of Care and CES are invaluable resources in providing services to veterans who are experiencing homelessness. Local stand downs are also amazing resources.

Zella: I agreed with the community partners previously discussed. However, I'd like to include the following services: the Off Base Transition Training is a viable service. They provide veterans with 10 employment focused workshops. These programs assist veterans that are not ready for employment for whatever reasons. Maybe they have mental health, they may have difficulty managing their emotions, active substance use, fleeing domestic violence and the like. It is imperative that we position employable veterans to not only get a job, but to keep a job. Another program is the Prison to Purpose. This is a 12-week program for veterans with criminal histories. This program addresses difficult conversations that may not be addressed with our team, for instance, sex crimes or violent crimes, which makes it difficult for clients to get jobs or even past interviews. And so, what we do for one the employer, the employment specialist with our program or job developer, they may not have the education or the experience to address these essential topics that incarcerated veterans must consider after being released from jail, probation, or prison. In other words, what we do is we learn how to stay in our, within our scope of practice. And when we connect a veteran to another community program, we're sending them to someone that is capable and have the experience to address the client that that to address the needs that that client have. The last program that I can think of is the Shutters to Shelter. This is a program that helps homeless veterans obtain employment in the apartment setting. Now the program offers veterans up to 70% off their monthly rent. That's 70% off of their monthly rent for six months to a year, plus provide them a job making a living wage and I believe they start them out with like \$18.00 and above depending on their experience or put them in an apprenticeship. But this corporation seeks veterans to fulfill positions such as maintenance and HVAC positions.

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HOST: Great. Thank you all for taking the time to really list some of those out for us. I think that's important. We know that many veterans experiencing homelessness don't have a stable address, a phone number, or access to reliable transportation. Let's get into how these factors can impact their ability to secure employment and how veteran service providers might help to overcome these barriers. So, in what ways do these factors pose a challenge? And what resources are available to help veterans get a stable address and phone number as well as reliable transportation?

Rashida: The big three barriers of going back to work outside of housing are a lack of phone or e-mail, transportation, and childcare. For veterans who are experiencing homelessness, the big three plus addressing mental health, physical health and food insecurity can add additional hardships when returning to work. Through partnerships with organizations like the VA, local American Job Centers, faith-based organizations, hospital social workers, school districts, food pantries, and other service providers. Our teams at U.S.VETS are able to provide linkages to resources and leverage resources as a result.

Savannah: Internal to our agency, our HVRP team operates out of a site that also has emergency shelter beds for veterans experiencing homelessness. This has allowed us to address all three of those barriers as our staff is on site, they can use the office location as their mailing address, and our team is available to assist with transportation needs. Through the program we have funding available for transportation costs such as bus tokens or fuel cards, to significantly alleviate transportation barriers. In rural counties, we've worked with employers to develop, rideshare or carpooling programs that have resulted in the veteran's ability to maintain employment. We've also relied on the use of a contracted transport company to and from major manufacturing companies that are not located in an urban area or along a public transit route.

Jonathan: As previously mentioned, SSVF and HUD VASH play a vital role in shoring up the lack of resources to stabilize the veteran's barriers to employment. Every

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American Job Center across the country has a veteran representative who serves the specific needs of the veteran with barriers to employment. They will do a warm handoff to partner agencies within the American Job Center to ensure all wraparound services are provided to sustain the veteran post-exit.

Zella: Homelessness, lack of phone services, and transportation barriers impact veterans' ability to obtain and maintain employment, as evidenced by: emotional instability, inability to consistently get to work and arrive on time, difficulty calling employers, the potential to drink or drug use increases, shame and guilt result in broken communication within their support system. Now we as service providers could include in our statement of work, standard operating procedures, and include in our budgets for supports like gift cards for gas, lunch, groceries, bus passes, also connect with daycare associations to establish partnerships and plan for veterans placed in employment to qualify for daycare automatically. Because a veteran as veterans have become a priority in housing and employment, this needs to happen with the day and dependent care to at least eliminate the wait list and help veterans get the services that they need so that they can keep their employment. Essential auto repairs is another big ask, because sometimes their cars break down, they may need tires to get to and from work, or they may need a battery or something of that sort. The last one is a system where house housing programs house employment employable and employed homeless veterans within 4 to 4 1/2 weeks from the date that they are hired, and grantors include temporary rental stipends for non-housing programs to make a one-time, non-recurring motel or hotel payment for up to two months. This way it will give the other housing programs that are available in the community time to get the clients into their programs. This stipend could be distributed in weekly increments to veterans until that permanent housing program kicks in, with the understanding that the veteran would forfeit this privilege if they violate their signed rental agreement and with the understanding that it would be a one-time, non-recurring payment.

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HOST: Great information. Now let's dig a little deeper and discuss how veterans, service providers, and other serving veterans experiencing homelessness can address the challenges we've discussed and ensure services are accessible and individualized to the veteran's needs.

Karen: Veterans who are experiencing homelessness or a loss of job need many different types of supportive services in order to begin their journey to permanent housing or employment. As a provider, we must remember that every veteran that enters a program does not need every service or supportive services that our programs provide. We must ensure that during the assessment phase, we are truly identifying the veteran's needs and addressing barriers that prevent them from being housed or being employed. This is the necessary step for the veterans to be successful. We must not assume we know beforehand what veterans' needs are and must work with veterans where they are. We must listen to what our veterans are saying and work with the veterans to determine what success looks like for them, and we must be willing to work with the veteran to reverse course and begin again if the veteran's plan isn't working. Providers must also address transportation barriers by providing gas cards, bus passes, or bicycles if buses aren't available. For veterans seeking employment, it is necessary to assist them with obtaining documents needed for work. It is necessary to ensure that they have the proper work attire for job interviews and when they begin their employment. They must have the proper tools, also. Employers also hesitate to hire anyone without an address, so allowing veterans to use the office address as a mailing address goes a long way in helping veterans with their employment.

Rashida: That's great information, Karen. I would also say that it starts with building trust. Do not over promise and under deliver. Trust is easily broken when service providers don't follow through on what they say they will do. We must also be flexible on how we meet with veterans. Maybe the traditional office hours do not meet the needs of a veteran who has medical appointments to attend during the day, so being available on weekends or after posted hours, might meet those needs. Also remember not to use

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acronyms when introducing services and always be patient. Remember when someone is in crisis, they may not be ready to answer what can feel like an endless number of questions. I recommend providing a snack during intake. It's easier to complete intake when clients are not hungry. Additionally, if a veteran is struggling with technology usage, consider having another veteran provide peer support, except when completing confidential documents.

Jonathan: I concur with Rashida. It starts with and ends with trust. This includes follow up even after the successful outcome to a good, sustainable job.

Savannah: I've mentioned this previously, but the success of service provision is based on meeting the veterans where they're at and establishing rapport. No two veteran circumstances are the same, so the method and type of services provided should not be the same. Collaborative case management and goal development are critical to the success of the veteran experiencing homelessness. Too often we have seen veterans experience referral fatigue, where they're required to navigate a complex system of service providers at different locations with different eligibility, resulting in a lot of times in their giving up on seeking help. To alleviate this, we work to provide a one stop service provision experience for each veteran. For example, if we have a veteran experiencing homelessness that's able to work but has no immediate shelter, clothing, food or means of transportation, we'll enroll them into HVRP and provide onsite, at time of intake, a representative from the American Job Center who can assist with resume development, in addition to placement into a shelter bed at the HVRP site, the immediate purchase of clothing during the intake, and a warm meal donated with nonperishable food items to supplement, all during the intake process. Once the veteran's emergency needs are taken care of, we bring employers onsite to conduct interviews for jobs that are located on public transit routes or within reasonable walking distance to any number of permanent housing opportunities that we also work with the veteran to receive.

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Zella: We must also meet the veteran exactly where they are, help them through difficult places. Oftentimes agencies distribute referrals, but not every veteran can achieve the goal that we would like for them to. Some may get a job only to lose it within weeks. The truth is some veterans may appear ready to work, but once they obtain employment or training services, it's discovered that they cannot keep the job or attend training because of underlying issues that surface and must be addressed. For instance, a female fleeing domestic violence who believes she's ready to work and learns she can't hold the job because she's triggered by certain events and don't possess effective coping skills. The employer may not understand this type of behavior, but she can have a safe place to come to with the team that that she's working with, like her employment specialist. See, they may be embarrassed to discuss these things with individuals and initially even with their employment specialists. However, building a rapport at enrollment and establishing a therapeutic relationship with them is key because when we do a post follow up call on them to check up on them, there's always that one phone call or e-mail that might open the door for them to speak. We can't make every veteran be ready, but we as a team can learn to be available when they are ready.

HOST: Now we just heard about referral fatigue and Savannah, that's so important to bring up to really have that more one stop approach and so I think that's important to remember as we drill down a little more and go through a couple of additional questions in which we are going to talk about referrals and, and additional services. But as we do consider the needs of veterans experiencing homelessness, what information should veteran service providers be aware of to appropriately provide referrals or offer other resources? Jonathan, let me get you to jump in here first, please.

Jonathan: Sure, Hannah. I would say the veteran's physical, social, and mental state of mind place emphasis on their limitations and barriers to employment. Focus on what got them to that place and how they see themselves needing assistance to get to a better

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place. It's not what you know them to be, know, or do. It comes down to what they are willing to sacrifice to get to a neutral environment with the least distractions.

Jennifer: Outside of employment, veterans experiencing homelessness are typically working on identifying permanent housing, accessing healthcare and mental health care when applicable, and other services tied to the barriers they're facing. It's important for providers to partner with other organizations in their community in order to facilitate and receive referrals for additional services that their organization cannot provide.

Savannah: Once we establish trust and rapport, we're able to learn that veterans experiencing homelessness have multiple barriers that have led them down the path to homelessness. Without recognizing these, whether it's untreated or undiagnosed mental health, significant trauma, physical limitations, or chronic substance use just for to provide a few examples, and then working to address those barriers, the cycle of homelessness will continue. From a service provider perspective, a housing or employment referral can occur without addressing the critical barriers that exist. However, the barriers not only prevent the follow through of action steps to receive services but impacts the veteran's ability to process information to receive the necessary services. Blame is often placed on the veteran instead of those barriers that they're struggling to overcome.

Karen: One of the things that providers must be aware of is that we're not going to be able to address every need that a veteran has in our program. Therefore, as a provider, it is imperative that we collaborate with other community partners on an ongoing basis to learn about other community partners. By knowing what they do, we can share not only the information with our veterans, but when we do a referral, we should be able to do a warm handoff with the name of the agency, the name of the contact person, and when the agency will be expecting you.

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Zella: Veterans experiencing homelessness may have a wide variety of barriers to overcome. It's important for veteran service providers to network with other agencies to assist the veteran participants. Some of the areas of need include: accommodations for persons with disabilities, they may have medical or mental health disorders or barriers that need to be addressed, childcare or dependent care, sometimes they have a parent or maybe a child now that needs that 24 hour care or ongoing care, substance use disorders to determine whether or not they need residential/outpatient services, financial literacy, especially for those veterans that may seem to become at risk of homelessness/have a history of that, legal aid services for veterans that have a legal history, maybe it's with outstanding tickets all the way up to be having a history of incarceration in jails or state prison, all the way up to federal prison, and that would also include shelters, temporary shelters, making sure that they can get to a safe place to live while they're in transition for permanent housing and other supportive services.

HOST: Now we've established that certainly not all resources can come from a single provider or agency. Are there any additional partnerships that that you recommend, or you would like to talk more about that are really critical to support veterans experiencing homelessness in their efforts to secure employment and stable housing?

Savannah: Our HVRP has a strong network of partnerships to secure employment and stable housing. As previously mentioned, we partner with American Job Center veteran representatives and WIOA specialists, as well as with employers that have on the job training and apprenticeship opportunities, Supportive Services For Veteran Families, VA HUD VASH and Grant and Per Diem programs, as well as the VA Community Employment Coordinator, our Coordinated Entry System, and Continuum of Care, and the VA Chapter 31 Rehabilitation Program.

Jonathan: I concur with Savannah, well said.

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Rashida: Assisting veterans and obtaining employment starts with having a strong network of veteran friendly employers. I can't stress enough the importance of having employers that not only offer good jobs, but also have an amazing culture where workers want to be there. They have a dedicated team, peer support team, ready to provide support to a veteran who may be struggling a bit as they acclimate to their new role in the work environment. They are willing to call your organization before letting a client go that you have placed or if they're facing disciplinary action. Others have been mentioned, but community colleges, local VFW's, school districts, hospitals, local law enforcement agencies and a strong base of volunteers are additional partners.

Karen: As my peers have mentioned, there are many good opportunities for partnerships aimed at supporting veterans with finding and securing employment and housing. This podcast will include a resource guide with links to many of the resources being shared. So, I will list a few more that you can find in the guide: SSVF program, HUD VASH program, HUD Rapid Rehousing program, Grant Per Diem program, local workforce centers, VA VocRehab, Department of Labor and state-funded employment programs, CoC and Military Transition Centers.

Zella: Absolutely. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness is the only federal agency with the sole mission focused on preventing and ending homelessness in America. This Council consists of 19 federal agencies that help create and catalyze implementation of the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. Now, this USICH works across federal, state, and local government, as well as the private sectors to help communities create partnerships. They use resources in most efficient and effective ways and employ evidence based best practices. This is included in the podcast resource guide, and I recommend visiting the website and the website of the 19 specific agencies to determine the various types of services they provide to end homelessness.

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HOST: Great and thank you so much for the reminder that there is in fact a resource guide that is accompanying this podcast. So, so I think this is a good time to really point that out. Please make sure to download that and use that for the future. The partnerships you shared are critically important and we know that veterans can need different kinds of supports and partnerships at different points in their journey. So, let's talk a little bit about the type of support a veteran might need if they do in fact secure employment, but they don't yet have stable housing. Rashida, would you get us started on this question?

Rashida: Some veterans are actively seeking employment or have pending employment when they come to U.S.VETS for housing services. For this reason, my team will determine what services are needed. For example, if the veteran does not have a phone number or e-mail address, the team will work to ensure that the veteran has what's needed to communicate with their future employer.

Jennifer: Absolutely Rashida. Also, if veterans are not already connected with a program that can assist with securing permanent housing, referrals can be made to other organizations within your local CoCs, SSVF, and HUD VASH.

Jonathan: Jennifer hit the nail on the head. It also depends on the barrier that has kept them from obtaining stable housing.

Savannah: I agree with my colleagues because we operate under the housing first model. We recognize the significance of stable housing as a precursor to the overall stability of an individual's life, including secure employment. For these reasons, our network of veteran service agencies and providers work quickly and efficiently to provide permanent stable. Housing for veterans, whether employed first or not.

Karen: As my peers have noted, we must address the imminent needs of emergency housing transportation include to provide stability.

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Zella: Great responses. Another valuable resource is Veteran Affairs. It's helpful to have flyers available identifying the seven types of VA programs available for veterans, such as the housing assistance, health care services, foreclosure assistance, employment services, mental health programs, justice outreach program, reentry assistance. Just because they are considered veterans, it does not mean they know all the services available to them through the VA. Sometimes they assume that I've received the services, for instance, from HVRP, I can't receive the same services from another program. That is so not true. It is our responsibilities as providers to make sure that veterans connect with all services that could help them with their specific needs to at least to help them to determine whether they are eligible for that program or not. Because each service provider we may have similar names or similar responsibilities, but no two programs is the same. What we do, another program may not. For example, our local resource that we use is the Texas Veteran Network-Combined Arms. This is an extension of United Way, which is a resource center for all. However, Texas Veterans Network is a resource center specifically for veterans. Many veteran community partners are connected with them, and we've been screened/monitored for our response time and whether we provide appropriate services that we say we do, and I've even seen them unenroll veteran agencies that don't tend to veterans appropriately and effectively. Nevertheless, there are veteran resource pool extend throughout Texas, and it's broken into regions, and they are able to link veterans with current resources in their specific areas that they live. And you can locate other state and local program like this by visiting the link to Mission United, located in the resource guide.

HOST: Thank you all so much for participating in today's podcast and sharing this really valuable information. As we come to the end of the podcast, are there any final words or important takeaways you want to ensure that we highlight here? What do you hope our listeners walk away with? Karen, can I get you to begin here?

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Karen: Thank you so much for inviting me to participate in this podcast. What I'd want a business to take from this is that they understand that ending veteran and homelessness can't be done by one person, one company, one agency, or one community. Veterans experiencing homelessness have different needs and barriers, and we must address their individual needs and not use the same approach for all veterans. I want listeners to understand that the best approach to ending veteran homelessness is a community approach with collaborative efforts within the community.

Zella: Thank you for the invitation. I hope that we establish and continue to build therapeutic relationships with veterans, stay approachable and not make promises we can't or will not keep. Furthermore, we must meet veterans exactly where they are, which is why I love motivational interviewing and strength-based models because they do meet veterans exactly where they are, and they build them up and not turn them down. Therefore, it's imperative not to be so quick for us to give up on them.

Jennifer: Thank you so much for inviting me to participate in this discussion. I've enjoyed being able to hear from colleagues in different roles about their expertise in serving veterans experiencing homelessness. Conversations like this one are so important because everyone serving veterans experiencing homelessness should be serving their participants with an individualized approach in a way that maintains dignity and respect. So much of what we talked about comes back to trust building with veterans from the point of outreach throughout the entire process.

Rashida: It has been a pleasure joining colleagues from across the country to share more about serving homeless veterans and their families. What I would hope our community of listeners would take away from what we have shared is that there is no cookie cutter way of serving those who are facing dire life circumstances. We can write all the policies and step-by-step manuals, but none of that really prepares you to sit across the table from someone who is carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders. Each veteran served has their own story and journey, and as service

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providers, our first goal should be to listen. Listen with the heart to understand what is being asked for and why. Start building rapport through the outreach, assessment, and enrollment process. Veterans deserve to be served with dignity. That starts with all of us.

Savannah: Thank you for the invitation today as well. I have worked with and navigated a significant number of veteran service agencies in the state and country. One critical take away is that the success or failure of service provision can be based on collaborative, innovative partnerships. No one agency or provider can address every barrier associated with the veteran experiencing homelessness. Without the community recognizing the depth of veteran homelessness and working every day to find new solutions to problems, communicating, advocating, and doing so together as a community, veterans experiencing homelessness will not receive the assistance they deserve. I hope listeners take away the understanding we all share, that it is a problem across the country, but that each of us on this podcast represents agencies and communities that are here to serve those who have served our country.

Jonathan: Thank you for allowing me to partake in this important podcast that seeks to provide a blueprint for helping grantees meet their performance goals and achieve a successful outcome. Every veteran experiencing homelessness comes with a unique set of circumstances; they are not one size fits all. That success is measured by how well the organization develops effective tools for branding, digital and media advertising, outreach and networking with internal and external stakeholders creating standard operating procedures, covering the execution of the terms of condition, staff roles and responsibilities, case management delivery processes, using the Bureau of Labor Statistics and VA data to assist with the service delivery areas targeted population. That, coupled with co-enrollment through the American Job Center and partnering with the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program specialist, is crucial to the success of their existence as a grantee. Lastly, seek out your Grant Officer Technical Representative and keep them on speed dial.

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HOST: Thank you all so much for joining us for today's podcast and providing all of this valuable information to help veteran service providers better serve veterans experiencing homelessness. As a reminder to our listeners, this does have an accompanying resource document, so please, do make use of that. That should really just be something that you download and have available. If you would like more information about serving veterans, please visit NVTI.org to access other resources like this podcast. We're constantly adding new materials at NVTI.org, so please do check back often. And we also invite you to continue the conversation at the Making Careers Happen for Veterans: Community of Practice. Thank you.

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